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# Costa Del Sol:

## Living Between the Lines

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### **An Audiovisual Construction of a City**

In the early 1960s, with mass tourism springing up as a global phenomenon, Costa del Sol<sup>1</sup> underwent one of the most radical urban transformations seen in Spain. This transformation drove Costa del Sol from being a marginal area in the already feeble production system of the south of the country to becoming a main destination for international tourism. However, this transformation did not take into consideration the idiosyncrasies or traditions of the area, but rather sought to address the weaknesses of the place through the application of foreign models of urban development. Overnight, a new era took over this peripheral coast of Spain with the promise of an everlasting future.

The lack of urban, economic, and political development of the area could put up little resistance to this change, and instead allowed it to accelerate. However, it was the complete lack of urban regulations or governance models that opened up the gate for private investment, which arrived *en masse* and rapidly took the helm of urban development. The incoming flows of capital proved irresistible to the public administration, and allowed it to enter the region unfettered. As a result, Costa del Sol was built on the run, based on immature and uncoordinated municipal plans.

Due to the lack of an integral urban plan, the N-340—a highway that stretches lengthways across the whole coast—became the exemplary element of the contemporary Costa del Sol. Winding along the tight space between the sea and the mountains of Malaga, the highway is the principal actor of its urban and social landscape.

The inordinate emphasis placed on the road fed a whole new urban narrative at a time of

<sup>1</sup> Costa del Sol Occidental (commonly known as Costa del Sol) is a Spanish region located in Southern Malaga, a Spanish province that belongs to the Autonomous Region of Andalucía. It comprises a thin strip 10 km wide and 150 km long, and serves as the natural border between Europe and the African continent. Costa del Sol is composed of nine independent townships whose population amounts to half a million inhabitants. According to estimates (“Plan de Ordenación del Territorio de la Costa del Sol Occidental” Junta de Andalucía, 2006), the territory is also used by an additional floating population of 8,500,000.

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economic stagnation. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the loss of competitiveness in tourism revealed the limitations of the speculative model of urban development and a new blueprint was needed. The government modernized the urban discourse with its depiction of a great Linear City, which aspired to compete in the global market and would reintroduce Costa del Sol as a great metropolis. Transforming Costa del Sol into this Linear City took precedence over necessary infrastructural developments. As a result, the government imposed rigid guidelines, unaware of the social complexity of the area that had emerged since the 1960s.

Today, Costa del Sol is forced to pay for the abuses of private speculation and the political corruption that backed it. The media's narrative on this transitional period has depicted Costa del Sol as a submissive society that sold its soul to the devil and consented—carelessly, even eagerly—to be laid to waste by private interests. To complete this partial portrait, we must add the feeling of nostalgia for the old Costa del Sol, the one that embraced the era of tourism with optimism and joyful vitality. Contained in summer postcards and family photos, that memory is hard to locate today, worsening the sense of pessimism and failure.

How might we escape this problem of forgetting? This is our proposal: if we are capable of tracking the inheritance of that nostalgia, we might be able to retrieve some of the creative spirit that characterized the area not so long ago. It is not about divorcing the present from the past, but recognizing the past in our present.

The speculative logics that determined the construction of the modern Costa del Sol make it an ideal site for examining the tension between the city government's strategy (centralized planning and enforcement) and the city's urban reality (a spontaneous and casual process). Our investigation introduces an alternative interpretation of the history of development in Costa del Sol and unveils trenches of resistance in a territory subject to global capitalism. In doing so, we emphasize the rich potential of the area by turning the spotlight on the attitudes and values of the citizenry. Their narratives demonstrate the plurality of Costa del Sol, a place that is bound to the free interpretation of individuals.

Our research has culminated in an experimental documentary that takes a close look at Costa del Sol and its voices. The film denies the linearity of the N-340 and depicts it as a cloud of vaguely located points, perceived and experienced by the area's inhabitants. The film is divided into twelve episodes, apparently unrelated, that depict a divergent social landscape whose coherence is achieved through the collective sense of belonging. This urban imaginary brings to light a pronounced and invigorating diversity, a Costa del Sol that constructs itself according to the ways in which citizens relate with their environment.

The film can be seen in its entirety at: <http://vimeo.com/84060889>. Below, we offer a brief description of four of the twelve episodes, along with a photo essay of stills from the film:

## **36°30'03"N 5°01'36 "W**

Surrounding the many golf courses along Costa del Sol, there exists a curious informal network of golf ball vendors. They usually operate from their cars, parked on the side of slightly hidden places. The balls they sell are those that were lost from previous golfers. Gardeners

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and security guards collect the lost golf balls in order to supply the vendors. Everybody knows each other and collaborates in a friendly way; even the police turn a blind eye to it.

Street vendors prefer not to attract too much attention, and thus they are wary of our crew's videocameras. Although they are locals of the area, they speak fluent English and are as knowledgeable about golf as professional players. Many grew up working as caddies for the visiting Americans who came to play golf in the early 1970s. "We earned good money, more than working," says one street vendor. For him, "working" refers to those jobs many had before the arrival of golf courses to the area: cultivating the fields on which the courses now stand. "Golf gave life to the area. Before, this was just crops. There was nothing here."



## 6°30'07"N 5°00'09"W

On the side of the road that leads to the town of Ronda, there is a row of fourteen houses of irregular shapes. One resident tells us that these houses were self-built by his parents, who came to the coast from the interior of the province when tourism first sprang up, hoping to find a job in the growing industry. At the beginning there was no water nor power supply. Over time, each family enlarged its house according to its needs, with no regard to building permits or the expertise of architects. Although the legal situation of the houses has since been regulated, their owners grew accustomed to living on the margins of the law.

These houses are located on the boundary between two townships, Marbella and Benahavis. With the formalization of urban planning, a dispute arose between the two local governments over land ownership. The resident explains that, while the township boundaries have moved several times in recent history, a couple of years ago they were finally fixed, dividing this small group of houses in two. "My home is split in half. My bedroom is in Marbella and my toilet in Benahavis. But here we don't give a damn about Marbella or Benahavis. We all belong to the neighborhood."



### **36°36'37"N 4°30'22"W**

At the entrance to the city of Torremolinos, there is a building in the shape of a boat on highway N-340. "Bazaar Aladino" was established in 1953 by Rodolfo Prado, a salesman from Malaga who came back from a journey to London mesmerized by modernity. According to his granddaughter, "he was the first to bring refrigerators and musical records to Malaga." The building naively mixes the aeronautical references of European Rationalism with the joy of the American way of life. It reflects the uninhibited spirit of Costa del Sol during the 60s, which is also portrayed in many of the postcards of that time.

"Bazaar Aladino" was a souvenir gift shop until the owners sold it to a real estate agency, which then turned it into an office. In 1993, the Prado family got together and bought the building again. Now it acts as an education center where the members of the family teach Spanish, English, French, and German, as well as painting, music, computing, and graphic design. With the Prado family back, "Aladino" maintains the happy and messy atmosphere that first characterized the shop when it was still a place where you could find beach apparel, postcards, photo cameras, and sunblock.



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## 36°34'01.0"N 4°35'52.1"W

The urbanization of Los Boliches is a result of the hard urban development that flooded the coast during the 1980s. The N-340 weaves among apartment buildings perched high up on the hill, revealing pieces of the sea here and there. What were once summer apartments have now become primary dwellings, if not empty or for sale. Offseason, the place gives a close sense of intimacy and of a lost luster.

An Irish resident—one of many foreigners who have retired in Costa del Sol after decades of summer vacations—complains about the environmental degradation of the area. He has seen the whole transformation of Costa del Sol and blames the inability of the Spanish government to handle the situation. “They were not educated enough to control this economy.” Paradoxically, this man, one of the primary beneficiaries of the tourism industry’s exploitation of the area, reacts to its development with a sense of NIMBYism and even colonialism. “All the big buildings they have and all the grandeur... that should never have happened to Spain. I can remember this coast with nothing. That wasn’t there, that wasn’t there [pointing at different buildings]. You could drive along and it was wide open. And then you would see a little village, where you could stop and have a drink, not caring about the world.” ■



## REFERENCES

La Ciudad Construida. Valencia, Spain. - [www.laciudadconstruida.com](http://www.laciudadconstruida.com)